

Effects of Violence in Media on Society

Editorial Staff • March 11, 2019 ━ 5 minutes read



Is society's violence the media's fault? This is the question that has been asked since before television was in every house. Of course there are the 11 different types of media today ranging from newspapers, to on-line reports and stories. There have been arguments upon arguments about this issue, and over 3,000 studies conducted in the world. Unfortunately there isn't one single result; there is only an array of supposed answers to this undying question.

University of Michigan (USA) psychologists Dr. Leonard Eron and Dr. Rowell Huesmann conducted a study, which continued for decades. This was conducted beginning in 1960. They took 800 eight-year-olds and found that children who watched many hours of violent television tended to be more aggressive in the playground and the classroom. They checked back with these kids 11 and 22 years later. They found the aggressive eight-year-olds grew up to become even more aggressive. They testified before congress in 1992 stating, "Television violence affects youngsters of all ages, of both genders, at all socioeconomic levels and all levels of intelligence. The effect is not limited to Essays on Communication Media children who are already disposed to being aggressive and is not restricted to this country."

David Phillips, a scientist at the University of California in San Diego conducted a study on prize-fights on television. He thought of this topic, because he felt there wasn't enough research being conducted on the copycat violence. He found that after prize fights on television, there would be about a 10 percent increase in murders for a few days afterwards.

He quoted,

It also seems to be the case that the kind of person killed just after the prize-fight is similar to the person beaten in the prize fight.

There are four major theories of television violence. The "arousal" theory, the "social learning" theory, the "disinhibition hypothesis," and the "catharsis hypothesis." These four hypothesis/theories are old and new conclusions to the question at hand. It is notable to see that some of these theories were stated as early as 1961. Most would have to disagree with these theories just because of the age of their births, but to most people's surprise they still hold in the 21st century.

The arousal theory is basically self-explanatory. This was theorized by P.H. Tannenbaum in 1975. He said exposure to television violence increases aggression because violence increases excitation, or "arouses" viewers. This is also being found in the recent studies, which shows the progression in the media's will to change.

The "social learning" theory was described by Dr. Bandura. This theory says ways of behaving are learned by observing others, and that this is a major means by which children acquire unfamiliar behaviour, although performance of acquired behaviour will depend at least in part on factors other than acquisition. A perfect example of this theory was when the murders occurred after the prizefights.

The "disinhibition hypothesis" was L. Berkowitz's investigation. This hypothesis explains that television violence in certain circumstances will result in increased interpersonal aggression because it weakens inhibitions against such behaviour.

The final theory, "catharsis hypothesis" was written by S. Feshbach. This theory explains that under certain conditions exposure to television violence will reduce subsequent aggression. What this is saying is that if someone sees a fantasy on TV, or now with technology, entertains themselves with virtual reality, that fantasy is fulfilled, which makes them not feel they have to do that in real life.

So many people have discussed the topic of media affecting society, from Aristotle to the present day researchers. It has always been a question, but never as needy for an answer as now. Hopefully the government has some say in this soon, so the drama of centuries will finally be over. But that probably won't occur anytime soon. Aristotle was a big supporter of "catharsis." He believed that the audience became psychologically involved with the story on stage, even though they knew it was 100% fiction. He felt when aggression climaxed with the actors, there was a "catharsis" in the audience, which was pleasurable to experience and left the audience "cleansed, uplifted, and less likely to act violently among themselves."

All Sigmund Freud also felt as Aristotle did by saying, "Unless people were allowed to express themselves aggressively, the aggressive energy would be dammed up, pressure would build, and the aggressive energy would seek an outlet, either exploding into acts of extreme violence or be manifesting itself as symptoms of mental illness. But there is no direct evidence for this conclusion. But for people who have never been taught to understand the consequences of their action these things can unintentionally set forth a chain reaction of ever more impulsive behavior.

Hollywood figures of the 21st century blame factors such as poverty, drugs and alcohol, poor schooling, lax gun control and a general breakdown of families but not screen violence. University of Iowa professor of Journalism and Mass Communication Albert Talbott said, "In the '30s, when I was a toddler, one of the things that concerned parents were comic books and the violence in them. As soon as the modern media started to develop, we have all kinds of things on how we are affecting people." Technology today isn't helping everyone to feel better about this dilemma. It is actually going to get worse before it gets better. There isn't only movies or news reports someone can watch to see violence, but also the new video game craze. Video games have become an enormous industry in the past decade. People from 4 years old to 70 years old own their own video games.

So many studies have been done on the affects of media violence on children. Most are concerned with the results, especially parents. If the government, parents or others are so concerned with the effect of their child seeing violence on the television, maybe they should practice what they preach. They should think twice before buying video games based on violence for their children. This is where it gets sticky. Parents need to draw the line between appropriate and not appropriate. It would be a nice convenience to have a rating system on the television, but parents should be aware enough of what their children are doing and watching that they are the rating system themselves. What is the effect of violence in media with children compared to with adults ? Children model behaviour they see in the media.

If they don't see the consequences of violence, it will teach them that violence doesn't cause serious harm. Adults see more violence in the media than actually exists in real life. That's because producers believe that they have to include extraordinary violence in order to keep the viewer. When heroes use violence, children think that violence is an appropriate way to respond to problems, Children are younger, so they see things and apply that to their lives, because they are learning everything at that age. Adults look at it as the "mean world syndrome" in which they see how society is portrayed on TV, and they think that every neighbourhood is dangerous, like shown. When in fact most neighbourhoods are nothing like they are portrayed on TV. The writers and producers are exaggerating, to make it all interesting. There is also discussion of violence on TV not having any affect at all. People have seen so much, that they don't really think about the actual act occurring on screen. Hanno Hardt, a professor at J-MC School said, "It's lost its shock value. Maybe 20 to 30 years ago we would have been shocked. Now, a generation later, we know that this is a violent society. And when we read about violence, it only reinforces what we know." People have become used to seeing violence on television, but this has become somewhat surreal to them. They don't think of it as reality until it happens to them.

We have covered a huge amount of information about the effect of violence in media on society. Did we answer the question though? I don't think we did, but I do think that the answer is making progress. We are also a lot more informed now of what exactly is in the media right now, and what studies have shown to be happening. There has always been an issue of something effecting society, and there will always be a plentitude of scapegoats. What is the actual answer though? No one seems to have it. There is a lot of gray area, but society seems to be making this more of a black and

white issue. Will the government ever really take action? Does action need to be taken? Hopefully after reading this, one is more educated on the difficulty in answering these questions.

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